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State of the Schools Address

Summer Leadership Conference, June 21, 2006

Thank you for such a generous and kind introduction.

It has been a great year for public education in South Carolina, hasn't it? I am very pleased with the outcome of this year's budget, which brought full funding of the Base Student Cost, greatly needed expansion of programs for disadvantaged four-year-olds, and full funding for the Education and Economic Development Act. I am also very pleased to report that the General Assembly has funded the first significant school bus purchase in a decade, authorizing \$36 million to buy more than 600 buses. One of those buses -- which you'll see in every school district in South Carolina by November -- is parked outside right now. I hope you'll all go take a tour, and I know you'll agree that it's a great alternative to the failing 20-year-old buses that we're too accustomed to seeing on our state's highways.

To all the legislators in this room, thank you for supporting our public schools!

It's hard for me to imagine that today is the last time I will join you here as State Superintendent of Education. Eight years have gone so quickly. It has truly been an honor and a privilege to stand with you as we have carried the banner for public education.

I believe as Thomas Mann (1796-1859) believed that "public school is the greatest discovery made by man."

What a wonderful eight years it has been! When I ran for this office in 1998, my platform focused on six aims:

- Early childhood education--giving all of South Carolina's children the foundation to achieve and to succeed.
- Accountability--making sure that all schools have the tools and the support they need to meet the state's demanding standards.
- Safe schools and healthy children.

- Teacher quality--ensuring that every classroom and every school has caring, qualified teachers.
- Increasing parent and community involvement---recognizing that all of us must join hands and work together for the well being of all of our children.
- School leadership.

For eight years I have worked to advance these goals, and I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together.

It is popular in today's climate for our state's leaders to dismiss our successes in public education when it suits their political purposes. But here is the simple truth: over the past decade, you have done more to raise achievement in South Carolina than anyone who came before you. You have done remarkable things.

- Slide 1: South Carolina's SAT scores have risen 42 points in eight years while the national average has risen only 11. We have maintained the top five-year gain in the nation for the past four years, and we are ranked 17th out of the 23 states that test more than 50 percent of their students.
- Slide 2: For the first time in history, South Carolina's students are scoring above the national average on NAEP math – the only test for elementary and middle schools on which we can compare our scores with other states. We are ranked 27th out of 51 on 4th grade NAEP and 20th out of 51 on 8th grade math.
- Slide 3: On NAEP reading, South Carolina now ranks 27th out of 51 in 4th grade and 39th out of 51 in 8th grade. We are just under the national average, and gaining fast.
- Slide 4: On NAEP science, South Carolina is one of only five states that improved in both 4th and 8th grade, and we score well above the national average. We rank 30th out of 51 in 4th grade and 28th out of 51 in 8th grade.
- Slide 5: We are number one in the nation in improvement on 8th grade math and number one in the nation for improvement in 4th grade science.

Our PACT scores tell a similar story:

- Slide 6: In third grade English, we have risen from 65 percent scoring Basic or above to 87 percent.
- Slide 7: In 6th grade math, we have risen from 53 percent scoring Basic or above to 79 percent.

And our education initiatives continue to win national accolades:

- Slide 8: The national report card “Quality Counts,” published by the respected magazine *Education Week*, ranks South Carolina #2 in the nation for improving teacher quality and #3 for our academic standards and accountability. We are one of only eight states to receive an “A.”
- Slide 9: In 1998, South Carolina had 5 National Board Certified teachers. Today, we have 4,444 National Board Certified teachers, ranking South Carolina #3 in the country.
- Slide 10: Seven national studies have confirmed that South Carolina’s academic standards are among the most rigorous and comprehensive in the nation. We are third in the country for the rigor of our proficiency standards.
- Slide 11: Our high school seniors have received more than \$1.2 billion in college scholarships.
- Slide 12: Several weeks ago, Newsweek reviewed 1,000 high schools and ranked South Carolina 14th in the nation. The Academic Magnet School in Charleston County ranked in the top 10.
- And earlier this year, we learned that South Carolina is one of only three states chosen as a “Schools to Watch” state by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform. This prestigious honor allows schools in South Carolina to apply for recognition as models for middle schools around the nation, based on academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity. South Carolina schools that are selected as “Schools to

Watch” will become part of an exciting movement to guide middle school improvement and reform across the country, and we are very proud of the work that has led to such an impressive award.

Slide 13: Those results, and others too numerous to list, led Harvard University’s Monitor Group to conclude this about educational achievement in our state:

“Contrary to widespread perception in South Carolina, the quality of student performance in the state is typically on par with the U.S. average, and rapidly improving.”

That’s the good news about education in South Carolina – strong, significant, steady progress that anyone with an honest agenda can recognize and respect. We have every reason to celebrate and every right to be proud of what we have accomplished.

Unfortunately – you knew this was coming – there are other, more sobering statistics as well – statistics that tell us our work has actually just begun, not only in South Carolina but across America. The economy America has been warned about for decades – fueled by new technologies, characterized by rapid change and intense global competition – is no longer a future threat. It is today’s economic fact of life. And it poses educational challenges greater than any we have ever confronted.

Consider these facts:

- Slide 14: The 21st Century is bringing intense worldwide competition for human capital.
- Slide 15: America is changing rapidly. In 1960, 75 percent of Americans not native born were from Europe. By 2000, 77 percent of Americans not native born were from Asia and Latin America.
- Slide 16: Telecommunication is making the world “flat.” In 1975, it cost \$10 per minute for a phone call to India. Today, the cost per minute is just 5 cents.

- Slide 17: More and more domestic jobs are being done outside the country. In 2003, fewer than 100,000 U.S. tax returns were completed outside of the United States. Just two years later, over 400,000 U.S. tax returns were completed in India.
- Slide 18: More Americans are choosing to go out of the country to receive health care. In the U.S., the cost of a heart valve transplant is \$200,000. The cost in India is \$10,000, including round-trip air fare and a tour of the Taj Mahal.
- Slide 19: 150,000 foreigners underwent medical procedures in India in 2004, representing a 15 percent annual growth rate.
- Slide 20: The Top 10 Economies of the world today, based on percent of the world gross economic product, include the U.S. (28.4 percent), Japan (10.6 percent), Germany (6.4 percent), The United Kingdom, France, China, Italy, Spain, Canada, and India.
- Slide 21: Pop Quiz: Which countries are projected not to stay in the top 10 by 2050?
- Slide 22: Answer: France, Italy, Spain, and Canada.
- Slide 23: New quiz: Which countries are projected to be added to the top 10 by 2050?
- Slide 24: China, the U.S., India, and Japan will be the top four countries.
- Slide 25: The world's top 10 economies (percent of World GDP) today, 2050, and 1820.
- Slide 26: In China today, English texts are the fastest-growing sector of education books.
- Slide 27: "By 2025, the number of English-speaking Chinese is likely to exceed the number of native English speakers in the rest of the world. If we won't learn Chinese, then the Chinese will simply do the heavy lifting and learn English." Gordon Brown, Finance Minister, United Kingdom.

- Slide 28: Growth in the Number of Chinese College Students: In 1978, 1.4 percent of the college age population in China was enrolled in college. In 2005, 20 percent of the college age population was enrolled in college.
- Slide 29: Skilled and unskilled jobs in the United States.

In 1950, 60 percent were unskilled, 20 percent were semi-skilled, and 20 percent were skilled.

Today, 15 percent are unskilled, 20 percent are semi-skilled, and 65 percent are skilled.

- Slide 30: We must not be scared of competition, but we must be ready to compete.

How can South Carolina remain competitive in a world where rapid change is the norm? Where virtually all jobs require advanced skills? Where countries like India and China are surging ahead with vast numbers of well-educated workers and increasing scientific and technological strength?

First, I believe we must focused on the elements that have brought us this far: high standards, rigorous assessments, and accountability for results. For far too many years, South Carolina has committed to a particular education reform approach, only to abandon it mid-stream in favor of a newer idea.

But the education reforms of the past decade have given our state a solid foundation for strong and sustained progress. They are widely considered among the best and most effective in the nation. And they are working, raising student achievement not just a little, but by leaps and bounds, in even our poorest schools.

I am proud that South Carolina has not shrunk from but has embraced accountability, that our standards are among the highest in the nation, that we are rolling up our sleeves and doing the hard work of meeting them. We have set the right course. What we now need is the resolve to keep moving ahead.

Second, we must continue and intensify our efforts to combat the effects of poverty, a pervasive fact of life in South Carolina. One in six of South Carolina's schools serves a population of

students in very high poverty – 90 percent or more. Half of our schools have at least 70 percent living in poverty. Only 6 percent have less than one-third of their students living in poverty.

South Carolina's education reforms have helped to improve achievement among students across the economic spectrum, including those who live with the disadvantages of poverty. But much more is needed: Greater access to full-day early childhood programs, starting sooner, for children at the highest risk of school failure. Extended day and extended year programs to help children catch up and get ahead. More family literacy and parent education.

We must also recognize that poverty brings with it a range of behaviors, stressors, and psychological effects that influence both how children learn and how teachers respond to them.

In her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Dr. Ruby K. Payne describes the lives of children living in poverty—frequent home moves, multiple families living in one home, no transportation, struggles to keep the electricity and water on. Children from low-income families many times have poor concentration skills, give up too easily, fall behind in school, and eventually too often drop out. In these cases the school becomes the child's only hope and schools need the programs to accommodate all of our children.

Third, we must build on our success in raising achievement in math and science. President Bush has heard the voices of business leaders around our nation who recognize that America's competitiveness is threatened by lagging interest and performance in math, science, engineering, and technology – strengths that have fueled America's innovation economy for decades. His education agenda promises support for many initiatives that are proving effective in South Carolina – programs like math and science coaches, expanding Advanced Placement participation, and redesigning middle and high schools to emphasize higher achievement for every student.

South Carolina has made tremendous progress in improving student performance in math and science, as our NAEP scores prove. We need the funding and the focus to keep that momentum building.

Fourth, South Carolina must change the culture of education from one in which dropping out of high school is acceptable to one in which all students graduate, willing and able to think critically and creatively, to be re-educated several times, to embrace change.

We have made an excellent start through the Education and Economic Development Act on the urgent work of redesigning high schools to encourage all students to graduate and to pursue postsecondary education. After an exhaustive study of South Carolina's high schools, the High School Redesign Commission has recommended a number of additional steps to help us achieve these goals, focusing on four additional strategies:

- adding rigor, relevance, and relationships to the high school experience;
- allowing individual progression through high school by replacing "seat time" with proficiency requirements;
- encouraging dual credit courses by allowing high school students to obtain Carnegie credit and postsecondary credit at the same time; and
- redoubling our efforts to mitigate risky behaviors.

Some of these changes are under way at the Department of Education now. I hope the General Assembly will move to implement others during the next legislative session.

When I first came to the office of State Superintendent of Education, I knew, as a former teacher in family of educators, that the work you do each day is more difficult than any other job. As I leave this office, I am in awe.

Your dedication to the children of South Carolina, your commitment to public education, your determination to succeed even under the most challenging conditions has been a constant inspiration to me not just professionally but personally as well. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to stand with you, and I have never been more proud to call myself a South Carolina educator.

R. Tagore, the renowned Indian poet, wrote these lines:

I slept and dreamed that life was joy.

I awoke and found that life was duty.

I acted and behold

Duty was joy.

The duty I have had as South Carolina's Superintendent of Education has truly been my greatest joy.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together, and I am confident that we have moved closer over the past eight years to the goal President John F. Kennedy had in mind when he said:

“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is the private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”

Thank you.